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ABORIGINAL DECAY IN THE PACIFIC OCEAN

By Prof. J. Macmillan Brown, LL.D., New Zealand

It has been one of the puzzles of at least two generations of thoughtful men—the evanescence of primitive peoples. Civilization enters into their midst and they vanish by more or less slow degrees. And this in spite of all the efforts of philanthropy and science to arrest it. It is only where the humanitarianism of modern man stands aloof from them and leaves them and their old culture untouched that they have seemed to persist. Trader and missionary, in spite of their antipodal purposes and methods, alike force the race to decay.

PHYSICAL CAUSES OF THE DECAY

Cause after cause has been suggested for the phenomenon. The most obvious was the introduction of the epidemics of civilization into virgin soil, epidemics that had in their older haunts long rendered the survivors of their attacks immune or reduced themselves to unfearful incidents in the years of childhood. In a region like the Pacific Ocean which had evidently been quarantined in its more central groups of islands since the accumulation of huge urban populations on its shores, this was not only a true cause, but at first extraordinarily destructive. Mild diseases like measles or chickenpox or influenza of the older and less virulent type mowed down half the population of a Polynesian or Melanesian group. It was one of the frequently recorded incidents in the nineteenth century. And the nineteenth century came to be almost satisfied with this anticipation of the discoveries of bacteriology as the sole and sufficient reason for primitive racial decay.

SPIRITUAL CAUSE OF THE DECAY

But epidemics had their course and left the survivors comparatively immune and yet the peoples of the Pacific Ocean continued to melt away. Another and deeper reason had to be found. Some were content with the application to a whole people of a singular faculty of dying that had been observed in individuals of primitive races. A Maori who knew that his death was due or predicted would, though in the full strength of healthy manhood, turn his face to the wall and promptly die. It was this suicidal power of imagination that doubtless formed the real basis of sorcery in all the groups of the Pacific. There is no force so tremendous in human nature, even when civilized, as fear of a mysterious or unexplained power. And the natural complement to this faculty of inducing death by mere thinking was the final test of the young Maori *tohunga* or wizard-priest before he could pass from the *whare-kura* or university as fully licensed; he had to kill someone by the sheer power of thought—the superlative of hypnotism. Such imaginative tours de force have not been unknown in civilized communities. Nor is it uncommon to see highly cultured men and women who have lost their way in life pine away and die. Such an incident is not unknown even in the records of communities; the heart has been taken out of them by defeat and subjection and the result is slow phthisis.

MORE IMAGINATION THAN TRUTH

What more natural than to apply this phenomenon to the explanation of primitive racial decay? Before the mysterious powers of civilization over nature and life we naturally think that the primitive racial mind shrivels up in awe. The heart is gone and the race vanishes. But as far as the Pacific Ocean peoples are concerned there is less truth than imagination in this. The decay began long before the wonders of steam and electricity had penetrated into Oceania, and, in the case of the Maoris, the arrest of their racial decay is almost coeval with their complete familiarity with these; they have taken with as great gusto to

railway and steamer travelling and to the fascinations of the electric tram and the automobile as they did in the beginning of the nineteenth century to the war-efficiency of gunpowder. We have been too apt to attribute to the primitive mind the same wonder with which we looked first on these applications of science to practical life. As far as one has been able to observe, the scientific marvels of modern life make a less vivid and powerful impression upon the unsophisticated mind of the savage than we imagine. Their sorcery is a far more striking phenomenon to them than anything scientific we can introduce to their notice. Nor is there much in them that would correspond to what we mean by racial consciousness or individuality. They are as a rule too much broken up into their individual social atoms to have anything like what we call patriotism; there is of course attachment to the soil and therefore homesickness during absence from it; but they have not reached the stage at which their emotional imagination is able to attach itself to the race as a unity. To speak then of the heart being taken out of the race in the shadow of civilization is to deal with unrealities.

THE UPROOTING OF OLD CULTURE A FRUITFUL SOURCE OF DECAY

We get nearer to verity when we explain the decay of primitive peoples by the sudden dislocation of their system of life. The trader and the missionary alike do their best to root them out of their past; the former thrusts upon them textiles and ornaments that do not cost them a tithe of the labour needed for their own indigenous manufactures; the result is that the old products and arts are abandoned to a few old men or old women who try to keep up the tradition; he also brings the luxuries of civilized life, including that most potent of all solvents of the hard-won ethics and habits of thousands of years—alcohol; not that some of the aborigines have not themselves one or other native forms of it, but that the new concentrated forms destroy with ease “the native hue of resolution,” and soon wreck habits and traditions that are the equivalent of our self-control.

The missionary, though actuated by the highest unselfish purpose and opposed to some of the traders' methods, completes the wreck; in order to infuse his religious and ethical ideas, he has to eradicate the native past—the only safe foundation on which anything new can be built; he condemns even innocent customs because they are closely interwoven with those that are opposed to all civilized ideas. The result is that the natives have lost their old bearings and drift about amongst the half understood and often wholly unintelligible nomenclature of a civilization and a religion divided from their cultural and religious stage of evolution by thousands of years. They have gained a superficial knowledge of a new language and a new set of ideas at the cost of all that is rooted in their own far past. They deal no more with intimate facts and hard realities, but with words, the mere counters and symbols of life. Those who succeed in the new ways, succeed by means of their new luxury—the love of words. But most fail wholly and lose their grip of both lives, the old and the new. What wonder that the racial heart has gone out of them!

INFUSION OF NEW CULTURE NOT ALWAYS SOURCE OF DECAY

But there are groups, influenced greatly by both trader and missionary, in which the decay has been arrested or at least proceeds more slowly. The Maori of New Zealand is one example; the Melanesians of the southernmost islands of the New Hebrides supply another. So, here in New Caledonia, where I write, the decay on the main island is everywhere patent; up the slopes of the mountains one can see numberless abandoned terraces for taro culture, and traces of long-deserted villages are to be found in all parts; those who seem to know, assert that the aborigines must have once been counted by the hundred thousand; a poor twenty thousand or so are all that remain. In their visage and headform and stature one can see that, in the past, there must have been infiltration from both Australia on the west, and the Pacific on the east; and in their culture there is clear evidence of the dominant influence of Poly-

nesia; in a region that is fundamentally negroid and matriarchal, the features are often Caucasoid and the society is patrilineal as in Polynesia; in a region that has its social relations and marriage dominated by the division into kins, here we have an island that, like Polynesia, has advanced to the tribal relation and rule by chief. Yet the infusion of this new Polynesian culture that broke the tradition of the past failed to destroy the racial energy or introduce decay. It was the European trader and planter and miner and missionary that brought doom to the race. And yet on the Loyalty group, lying off the east coast of New Caledonia, the same new elements failed to introduce so galloping a consumption.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE PUT NEW LIFE INTO THE BARBARIANS

We shall have to go deeper down than the sudden dislocation of the past if we are to find the true cause of primitive racial evanescence. And there is a historical contrast that makes this absolutely necessary. There resulted no such decay amongst the barbarians to the west and north and northeast of the Roman Empire by contact with its civilization. Instead of being destroyed by its influence, they seemed to have been reinvigorated. They destroyed it instead of its destroying them. What was destroyed by the extension of the Roman power and culture was the even more refined civilizations away to the east and not the barbarous and even savage nations that stretched away all round it in the other directions. So it was that the Hellenes, in absorbing the culture of the eastern empires also destroyed them, whilst by their colonies they tamed and reinvigorated the less civilized peoples to the west.

There is something very striking in the contrast between the influence of the ancient civilizations and that of the modern upon primitive peoples. It might seem that the cause lies in the character of the contact; the old civilizations were mediated by empires of conquest; the modern influence of the higher civilizations on the primitive peoples has advanced chiefly from the side of humanitarianism and

religion. But we must not forget that even when Rome became the centre of Christendom and converted the barbarians it was only to give them the strength and character to react upon it and ultimately master it. Rome decreased while the converted barbarians increased.

ROME SET THE BARBARIANS TO THEIR CUSTOMARY WORK— WAR

The secret lies in the fact that Rome made use of the barbarians on the outskirts as soldiers. In breaking with their past they did not break with the work that they were best at—that of war. They entered into the employment of their new masters with their whole heart and soul; and the result was that they became the masters, being more virile both racially and individually. It is not that war is the basis of racial health and energy, but that war was the main work of these barbarian conquerors of the Roman Empire and work is the basis of all health in the race as in the individual.

IN SAVAGE LIFE THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IS CULTIVATION FOR WOMAN—WAR FOR MAN

With this key we can easily unlock the secrets of the modern evanescence of primitive peoples in the Pacific. The work that occupied most of the time and energy of unorganised peoples in the Oceanic islands was war; in the wilder parts of New Guinea or Melanesia one can still see the woman going to her garden in the forest and returning from it laden with its products, whilst the husband or father stalks in front or behind, his only burden being his primitive weapons or his gun; this division of labour is absolutely necessary in these small societies that are in a state of perpetual war with their neighbors; men must fight whilst women must work; for garden cultivation is the basis of existence; canoe and house-building is but an incidental occupation. When the white man comes, his government must soon follow to protect the trader and missionary and then war must cease, the main employment of the

men. And without work they soon degenerate into mere idlers, and if they have access to palm-wine or European alcohol, rapidly descend into racial ruin. If the missionary had been wise he would, in attempting to abolish war, have taught his converts some other work and given them some impetus to develop their native industries. The planter was nearer to the truth when he induced the aborigines to labour in his plantation; even the trader was nearer it when he encouraged the native to work in the forest in order to buy his European goods. Francia had found this secret of making the aborigines save themselves, when he compelled them to work in Paraguay. The missionaries in the southern New Hebrides have arrested sterility in the natives by teaching them to work. And a large percentage of the Maoris by taking to farming and sheep-shearing have turned the decrease of their people these last twenty years into an increase. Away up in the eastern islands of the Malay Archipelago, without missionaries and with few or no traders, the natives are decreasing, because their old wars have ceased and they can get their living from the sago palm with little or no work; the sparseness of children is therefore one of the striking features of a native village.

STRUGGLE AND WORK THE ONLY MILLENIUM

The law of struggle is the basis not only of racial advance but of racial health and racial continuance. No species can persist if not subject to it. And under it work is the first necessity of existence. Any organ in our bodies, that is not in exercise, soon ceases to function and becomes a source of disease and death. So it is with the individuals in a community and with communities and races that make up mankind; shelter them from struggle and work will soon cease and with it all health and fertility. The twin curses of disease and sterility lie upon the idle. The old-fashioned paradises of leisure and pleasure which have become the new utopias in so many of the programmes and political platforms of labour are based more upon desire

than upon an insight into nature or human nature. Their realisation would mean the stagnancy that is practically death.

TRUE SECRET OF SUCCESS IN MISSIONS

The aborigines of the Pacific who have been dealt with by the humanitarian spirit of our age and through our fear of the name of slavery or compulsory work have been allowed to fall into idleness are as near to such paradises or utopias as man is likely to come, and hence their racial evanescence. If our paternal governments and our missionaries mean to save our primitive peoples from themselves and death, they must recognise the law of struggle and work as the only panacea. They must study their manners and customs and see how far they can modify these so as to make them methods and stimuli to work.